New Fiction

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club man, and it is explained that it is all but a dream. The mechanism of it is extremely clever: a familiar form, but handled with genuine originality. Regarded merely as fiction it is the cleverest thing Mr. Sinclair has done; highly successful from the point of view of literary technic. What the reader's reaction to it may be will depend upon the standpoint he takes. He has added one element that is conspicuously lacking in the New Testament—a sardonic humor. Here, for example, is the climax of the modern Western version of the Last Supper:

Mary Magna came in laughing, bearing the strawberry shortcake, and set it upon the table and proceeded to portion it out. When it was served, Carpenter said, "I shall not be with you much longer, my friends; but you will remember me when you see this beautiful red fruit on top of a cake; and also you will think of me and my message when you taste rich purple grape-juice that has perhaps stayed a day or two too long in the bottle!"

The central moral which the book aims

Charles Alden Seltzer, author of "West."

to state is perhaps best summed up in "Mr. Carpenter's" denunciation of Mob-land: "Now the hour is coming the horrors of the class war are upon you, ruin and destruction are at hand. . . . Your own children shall destroy you . . . because you knew not the time for justice when it came."

CRYDER OF THE BIG WOODS. By George C. Shedd. Doubleday, Page & Co.

THIS is a well conceived, smoothly told story; good literary artisanship exercised upon worth while material. It is concerned with the evolution, and to some extent the taming, of a man who began by being too self confident and who is a little too contemptuous of other folk at first but who comes out strongly in the end. He is a doctor, chiefly a surgeon, and is described by one of the characters as "something of a hermit and considerable of a bear. Rough. Big as an ox. Likes to bluster." He is fond of pointing out that most of the people he meets are morons, which may be true enough in general, but is tactless. He is jolted when the heroine, Frances, refuses to marry him, but it starts him thinking.

The story is located in a lumber town in the State of Washington and the forest plays no small part in it. There is also a tragic contest between the big lumber company which desires to buy up the settlers' lands at a low price and these owners. It develops into a regular battle in which Doc Cryder takes part as he champions the cause of the people though he knows it is a hopeless cause. He is also accused of treachery, of "selling out" to the "interests," and there are numerous complications. The plot, however, is not the commonplace affair of such a battle between the wicked corporation and the poor folk. It is elaborated with skill to a sound and striking conclusion. Of course the girl and Doc Cryder come out of it happily in the end.

It is a thoughtful book, free of preaching but nevertheless with a message which is best summed up in the Doc's conclusion: "We need a renaissance of the heart for we're still in the Dark Ages so far as the social spirit is concerned. Our minds have run ahead of our souls. . . . There's selfishness and greed among the wealthy and passion and ignorance among the poor; and between these millstones, if there be not a change, this people of ours will some day be ground fine."

Not a novel observation but it is well to have it preached again and concretely demonstrated in the form of fiction as in this story. The reply that Frances makes to the diagnosis just given is also to the point. "And that means education is necessary, doesn't it?" she asks. "Education in the true values of things and in unselfishness." It is worth while to note that this conclusion, in one form or another, turns up in nearly all the more important fiction of the day as well as in the more sedate sociological treatises. H. G. Wells of course has given it the widest and best statement in numerous places but the conclusion may be reached by many roads—that if modern civilization is to advance it can only be upon a new basis of education, using the word in the broadest sense.

DECEMBER LOVE. By Robert Hichens. George H. Doran Company.

MR. HICHENS set himself the very difficult task of describing a love affair between a woman of 60 and a man of 30—a task that most writers would have found disagreeable, but it is quite to Mr. Hichens's taste, and he handles it with great skill. Indeed, few authors other than he could have managed it so convincingly and without being actually repulsve. It is the Hichens of "Bella Donna" working even more delicately and subtly in his analyses than in the earlier book. As usual, he spins it out to far too great a length, with redundancies and overelaboration of the feelings and states of mind of his people, but it never really drags, and the people themselves are very lifelike. Perhaps his marvelously handsome blackmailer, all around scoundrel and "king of the underworld" is a too theatrical figure. It is hard to believe in him or his extraordinary power of

John Cournos, author of "Babel."

fascination, as exercised upon wealthy women, young and old, whom he desires to fleece. He is really little more than a necessary bit of the machinery of the plot. But the rest are human.

When we first meet her Lady Sellingworth, the Dowager Countess of Sellingworth, is 60 years old and has been in retirement for ten years. She has allowed herself openly to grow old while her contemporaries of the "old guard" of the Edwardian era continue to dye their hair and make up to represent youth. She had retired very suddenly ten years before, when she was 50, because she had indiscreetly fallen under the spell of the mysterious, handsome bronze tinted youth, who managed to steal her jewels, £50,000 worth of them. That jolted her into a realization of the dangers of vanity and unbridled passion in the somewhat elderly. But although she is outwardly calm, and keeps away from society, her mind is still young, and so, too, her temperament is unchanged. Youthful desire is not killed, though youth and beauty are gone. So when she meets the attractive young Mr. Craven the old trouble breaks out again.

Craven is greatly drawn to her, but does not understand her real feelings. The relationship is full of stained situations, and there are other complications, as the young and very beautiful American girl, Miss Van Tuyn, takes a hand in the game. It works up a crisis when the same bronze male beauty who victimized Lady Sellingworth gets a hold upon Miss Van Tuyn. The Dowager feels that she must warn the girl and does so with genuine heroism, as it involves telling her own ten years old secret. The sacrifice, however, also operates to teach her other things about herself, and she finally is content to marry the faithful Sir Seymour, who is a real contemporary and has been patiently waiting for her during her two previous marriages and her numerous extramarital escapades.

The whole business is at least on the edge of the abnormal; at all events of the unusual. But one must admit that there is no impossibility in it and that women of the temperament of this elderly professional beauty are not unknown. And, of course, Mr. Hichens is always clever and plausible in his studies. It makes a striking book, though it does leave a rather bad taste in one's mouth.

AN INSTRUMENT OF THE GODS AND OTHER STORIES OF THE SEA. By Lincoln Colcord. The Macmillan Company.

LEAVING W. W. Jacobs and all humor out of it, there are two main sorts of sea stories. There is the tale of high adventure, of buccaneering and smuggling, of yo-ho-ho and the hot clash of steel on steel—and a very merry and engaging sort of tale it is. And there is the story of long and deep probing into the quality of the human soul; the story which uses the hard hazards of the sea, and of the far jungles and untamed coasts on which it beats, as touchstones of the essential realities at the hearts of men who stand, so tiny and so valiant, beneath the scattered stars by which mariners point their courses.

It is the latter sort of tale that Lincoln Colcord sets out to write. It is the tale which has its obvious affinity with Melville at his best and in our day with William McFee and, master of them all, Joseph Conrad. It is a tale the mere effort of writing which constitutes of itself a badge of high sincerity, but it falls within a span in which it is risky to tempt comparison—and comparison becomes almost inevitable in the case of Mr. Colcord's new book, "An Instrument of the Gods, and Other Stories of the Sea." Especially—which is unfortunate—comparison with Conrad.

Nine stories are included in this volume, with three sea poems, impressive rather for sentiment than for poetic fervor, tucked in among them for good measure. The most ambitious of them are imparted to the reader through the medium of a cigar laden *raconteur*, who inevitably happens along whenever a crucial moment is within hailing distance and recalls with somewhat uncomfortable insistence the methods and mechanism introduced by the forever enchanting Captain Marlow. But the tempered wisdom of Marlow, the subtle un-

Louise Driscoll, author of "The Garden of the West."

derstanding, the sudden revelatory flashes lighting up the most secret recesses of the soul of man, revealing whole continents of human experience in one sudden, intuitional flare, are somehow lacking.

Ships burn at sea in these tales; great

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